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Take-off: In May of 1956, a former Air Force pilot named FRANCIS GARY POWERS went to work in Burbank, Calif., ostensibly testing a high-altitude plane for Lockheed Aircraft Corp. The plane, of course, was the U-2, and Powers' real job eventually was to fly reconnaissance missions for the CIA. Mysteriously downed in Russia in 1960, Powers and the U-2 landed in world headlines. The pilot spent 21 months in a Soviet prison before gaining freedom last February in a swap for Russian spy RUDOLF ABEL. Last week, it appeared that 33-year-old Gary Powers had come full cycle. Quietly departed from his job at CIA headquarters in Washington, he was back in Burbank working for Lockheed. His job: Re-testing the U-2, as assigned back by the Air Force intelligence station.

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